

New Rivalries

by Frontline

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Drama, Friendship

Language: English

Characters: Astrid, Valka

Status: Completed

Published: 2014-09-03 20:51:10

Updated: 2014-09-03 20:51:10

Packaged: 2016-04-26 19:54:31

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,483

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Astrid becomes jealous of Valka's knowledge and experience as a Dragon Rider. However, when Slavers capture a Dragon from the Sanctuary, they must put aside their differences

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Astrid clung to Stormfly's back as she swept over Berk, the village sprawling beneath her and she smiled to herself. It might not have been much, a damp, cold island where the waves crashed against the rocky shores, but it was home. It looked like a typical Viking village, rough wood and stone buildings clinging to the cliffs and hills, with one exception; The Dragons. Life in Berk had changed a lot over the last few years. Now, along with the sheep wandering over the hills and Yaks grazing on the pastures, there were Zipplebacks wandering through the streets, Gronkles snoozing in the sun, Monstrous Nightmares crawling across the rooftops and Deadly Nadders soaring overhead. Down below shoals of flying fish leapt from the water, their scales glittering and Astrid smiled.

>Time for some target practice.
'Stormfly, fetch!'

>She pointed downwards and Stormfly dived, talons extended to snatch up a fish from the water and flick it into her mouth.
'Good girl.'
Astrid said, rubbing the back of her head and Stormfly growled in approval. Then, a shadow fell over them and she looked up to see two Dragons fly overhead. One was the sleek black form of Toothless, with Hiccup on his back. Toothless was a Night Fury, possibly the last of his kind, who was missing half his tail after Hiccup had shot him down. Hiccup had wanted to make his name by killing a Night Fury but, after seeing him in pain, he'd been unable to do it. Instead, he'd trained him in secret, a strong friendship forming between them. Together, they'd fought against the Red Death, a battle which had cost Hiccup his leg, making them a truly matched pair. Even though

Toothless was three times the size of Hiccup, he was dwarfed by Cloudjumper; the newest arrival on Berk and partner to Valka, Hiccup's mother. Despite his size, he was one of the fastest and most manoeuvrable Dragons, thanks to his two sets of wings. However, it was Hiccup that she found her gaze straying to. She couldn't begin to imagine how he was feeling; he'd got his Mother back and lost his Father, all in one day. She watched as the two Dragons turned and sped away from the village and disappeared from sight, with a sad smile.

>Hiccup...

An hour later, Astrid guided Stormfly through the gate of the Dragon Academy and dismounted, giving her a pat on the neck.

>'Good job, girl.' She said, Stormfly giving a soft rumble of appreciation and she turned to the others. Fishlegs was squatting next to his Gronkle, Meatlug, carefully feeding her rocks. Despite his squat and heavy stature that gave him his name, Fishlegs was a decent Dragon Rider, at least as knowledgeable about Dragons as she was, and Meatlug was a Boulder-class Dragon with excellent manoeuvrability. Across the arena from him, lounging against the wall were Snotlout and Hookfang, his Monstrous Nightmare. When he saw her looking, he gave her a cocky grin and she scowled at him. While he was a jerk at times, he was a strong fighter and the natural partner for Hookfang, even though his arrogance sometimes got the better of him. However, Hookfang was quick to let him know when he was getting too big for his boots. As a Stoker-class Dragon, Hookfang was one of the largest and most powerful Dragons with a habit of setting itself on fire when it was angry. Finally, Ruffnutt and Toughnut were already sitting astride Barf and Belch, their Hideous Zippleback. Occasionally, one head would take a snap at the other, much to the amusement of the twins. However, someone was missing.
'Where's Hiccup?' Astrid asked.

>'He's not here yet.' Fishlegs said, looking up from Meatlug.
'That's the third time he's been late this week.' Astrid muttered, mostly to herself.

>'We don't need him, anyway.' Snotlout said, swinging astride Hookfang. 'If he doesn't care about the Academy anymore, then I'll take over. From now on, this is the Snotlout Dragon Academy and...Hookfang!'
>Hookfang had given a snort and tossed his head, flinging Snotlout forward to land in a heap and Astrid advanced, stepping on his chest.

>'Forget it, Snotlout. I'm in charge in Hiccup's absence. Now, saddle up. We'll start with formation flying and move onto target practice.'
>Ignoring the groans from Snotlout and the Twins, Astrid mounted Stormfly, gesturing for the others to follow her. However, as they flew away from Berk, she couldn't resist looking around.

>Come on, Hiccup. Where are you?'

After putting them through their paces for over an hour, Astrid ordered a return to the Academy, assembling them back in the Arena.

>'Alright.' Astrid said, placing the Book of Dragons in front of her with a thump and rifling through the pages.
'Who can tell me which Dragon this is?' She asked, pointing to the image hanging on the wall behind her. Unsurprisingly, Fishlegs already had his hand up. Strangely, so did Snotlout.

>'Snotlout?'
'Please. It's obviously a Monstrous Nightmare, like my awesome Hookfang.' He grinned and Astrid shook her head.

>'Fishlegs?'
'Actually, it's a Timberjack. It has the similar horns to a Monstrous Nightmare, but its wings are razor sharp.'

>'Whatever.' Snotlout snorted.
'Anyway, Timberjacks are mostly found in wooded areas and...

>She was interrupted by the rush of wings as Toothless and Cloudjumper swept into the Academy grounds.
'Sorry I'm late, gang.' Hiccup said, dismounting and pulling off his helmet.

>'I was showing Mom Itchy Armpit Island and I lost track of time.'
'No problem.' Astrid said, biting back the sharp reply that was on the tip of her tongue. Instead, she glanced over his shoulder at Valka, who had dismounted from Cloudjumper and was looking around.

>'So, this is your Dragon Academy?' She asked and Hiccup nodded. 'I always used to hate this place. It's wonderful to see it put to better use.'
'Yeah. After the Dragons moved in, Dad gave it to us to use and...'

>He trailed off, his face crumpling into a frown and Valka put her hand on his shoulder.
'It's alright, Hiccup. He'd be proud of what you've done here. Anyway, I'm sure that you and your friends have work to do. I'll leave you to it.'

>'Hold on, Mom.' Hiccup said. 'You don't have to go. You know more about Dragons than anyone. Astrid? You don't mind, do you?'
'...No.'

>'Well. Alright.' Valka said, folding her legs and sitting on the floor next to the others.
'What are we doing, Astrid?

Timberjacks?' Hiccup asked, looking over her shoulder.

>'Yes. As I was saying, the Timberjack is usually found in wooded areas where it uses its razor sharp wings to fell trees as it flies. It also defends itself using burning embers. Timberjacks are one of the more docile Dragons and...'
'That's not exactly true.' Valka said. 'While Timberjacks are normally peaceful, they will react violently when threatened or provoked.'

>'Right. Anyway, Timberjacks tend to avoid direct contact with humans and are wary off them...'
'Actually, Timberjacks are known to be protective of humans, sheltering lost travellers from storms under their wings.'

>'Right.' Astrid said, slamming the book shut. 'We're done for today.'
She turned and stormed off, not looking at Hiccup, one fist clenched at her side.

Astrid tightened the straps of Stormfly's saddle and climbed up, patting her on the neck.

>She was still fuming from how Valka had shown her up and she felt the need to burn off some steam. She urged her into a gentle glide, landing smoothly on the starting line. Already, the stands were packed, horn-helmeted Vikings crammed onto the wooden benches. Above them, Gobber stood next to a large horn, waiting to signal the start of the race. Behind him sat Spitelout and Gothi, the seat next to them where Stoick usually sat was empty and Astrid felt a fist close around her heart. Stoick had been Chief for as long as she could remember, having defended the village for years. Now, that he was gone...
Stop it. He's in Valhalla, Thor willing. And Hiccup's the Chief now.

>With an effort, she shook herself out of her thoughts, looking along the starting line at the assembled riders.
Snotlout, Ruff and Tuff, Fishlegs, Hiccup...what?

>She sat bolt upright as Cloudjumper landed next to Toothless, tilting his head towards him.
'What is she doing here?' She said, to herself, but Tuffnut answered.

>'Duh. She's here to race.'
Astrid ground her teeth together, and then a smile crossed her face.

>Perfect. This is my chance.
_Gobber sounded the horn to signal the start of the race and Astrid pressed her heels into Stormfly's flanks, urging her into flight. Almost immediately, Hookfang and Barf and Belch shot passed her and she shook her head. They were both impetuous; this wasn't a contest of sheer speed. She swept close to the ground, keeping her eyes peeled for movement. The contest was simple, in principle, at least. Several sheep had been specially painted with targets and then released back into their flocks that wandered around the village. The objective was to make three laps of the course, capturing as many of those sheep as they could before the final lap began.

>There!

>Astrid pointed down and Stormfly dove, snatching up the sheep with deft precision and soared skywards again. Now, however, she was a target. Urging Stormfly onwards, she looked back to see Hookfang bearing down on her, Snotlout grinning with his usual arrogance.
Predictable.

>Stormfly rolled left and Hookfang barrelled past her, unable to correct his course in time. Putting on another burst of speed, she shot over his head towards the finish line, dropping the sheep into her basket, glancing at the score as she did so. Fishlegs and Hiccup had both scored one a piece, equalling her score. Then, another sheep dropped from the sky and she looked up to see Cloudjumper pass overhead.
'Come on, Stormfly.' She said through clenched teeth. 'We can beat her.'

>Stormfly roared, putting on a burst of speed, and they raced after her. Down below, she saw another cluster of sheep with a target in the middle, but she ignored it. She knew that there was no way to grab it; as soon as she approached, they'd scatter in all directions and she'd lose it in the confusion. She needed to find an easier target. As she pulled up, Cloudjumper shot underneath her and she allowed herself a grin.
_Rookie mistake. There's no way that she can...what?'

>Her jaw dropped as Cloudjumper's second set of wings extended, beating furiously to let him hover over the sheep and his claws flashed out, plucking the sheep from the middle of the formation and he shot off. Astrid's jaw clenched and she shot off after him, aiming for the sheep that was hanging from his talons. Valka looked back and said something to Cloudjumper, who beat his wings furiously as she approached, the downdraft knocking her off course. By the time Stormfly recovered, Cloudjumper was already out of range and still accelerating. Astrid hammered her fist into her leg and shot off, angrily. To make matters worse, Barf and Belch flew past her, another sheep gripped in their talons and Ruff stuck her tongue out at her. Astrid gave chase, desperately trying to catch them, but Cloudjumper had already crossed the finishing line, with Valka scoring her second point.

>'Up, Stormfly.' Astrid commanded as she crossed the finish line for the second time, urging her higher and casting around desperately. Far below, she spotted movement and saw a lone sheep scurrying across the square.
'Stormfly, dive.' She said, gripping the saddle tightly as Stormfly folded in her wings and dropped like a stone. To her left, she saw Cloudjumper closing in and she held on tighter.

>'Just a little longer, girl.' She whispered, as the ground rushed up towards them. At the last second, Stormfly unfurled her wings and she swept past Cloudjumper, snatching up the sheep in her talons.
'Go, go, go!' She yelled, struggling for height, Cloudjumper powering

after them. She knew that he would catch them up, but they could still outmanoeuvre him. Sweeping left, she entered the tunnels that ran beneath Berk, knowing that Cloudjumper would be more hampered by the confines of the caves and that they could maintain their lead. As she expected, Cloudjumper fell behind as he was forced to slow down to handle the tight turns and she grinned to herself. Stormfly shot out of the end of the tunnel like an arrow, racing towards the finish line, dropping the sheep neatly into her target. Now, she was drawn with Hiccup and Valka on two points, with Fishlegs just behind on one. If she was going to win, she would need to get the Black Sheep. The final horn sounded and she turned towards the centre of the arena, just as the catapult launched the Black Sheep into the air and she raced towards it. However, before she could get there, Cloudjumper swept down and snatched it out of the air, turning and diving towards the finish. The contest would end as soon as someone scored with the Black Sheep.

>No, you don't!

>She gave chase, closing with Cloudjumper and she leapt from Stormfly onto her back, racing along her spine towards Valka, somersaulting towards her. However, Valka must have seen her, because Cloudjumper turned suddenly and she sailed over her to land on his head. She recovered and lunged at Valka, who dodged her blow and swept her legs from under her, pitching her sideways and she found herself falling.
'Stormfly!' She yelled, the ground rushing up towards her, but her voice was snatched away by the wind. Then, a shadow fell over her and she felt talons close around her, looking round to see Cloudjumper above her. Stormfly came into view below and Cloudjumper released her to land in the saddle as she shot forward, Valka dropping the Black Sheep into her net. The crowd erupted, cheering loudly as Valka stood up on Cloudjumper's back, raising her fist into the air. Stormfly growled, a deep, low noise in her throat and Astrid patted her neck.

>'I know. Come on, girl, let's get out of here.'

Astrid sat with Stormfly on the rocky outcrop, watching the waves crashing below her with her knees drawn up to her chest. Stormfly chirruped softly, nudging her shoulder and Astrid stroked her muzzle.

>'I know, girl.' She said. 'I don't like it, either.'
A shadow fell across her and she looked up to see Cloudjumper flying past, way over head and she jumped to her feet.

>'Come on, Stormfly.' She said. 'We're not taking this lying down.'
She mounted up and they shot skywards, heading after Cloudjumper, keeping low to the water. She figured that the colour of the water would camouflage Stormfly and keep them from being spotted. She was getting drenched from the spray, but she didn't care. After fifteen minutes of flying, she was soaked to the bone, her hands going numb, but she wasn't going to give up. By now, they were approaching a large island and Astrid could see movement as Dragons flew in and out from caves that dotted the cliff walls. Cloudjumper flew towards the island and entered one of the caves, disappearing from sight. Astrid rose away from the water and saw a flat mesa with another cave mouth leading off from it, guiding Stormfly into a landing and slipping off her back.

>'Let's go.' She said, heading towards the cave and Stormfly followed her. Inside, it was gloomy with shafts of daylight coming from a few holes in the roof. And it smelled of Dragons. Astrid's feet crunched over the loose gravel as she made her way onward, heading towards the light at the end and emerging into the sunshine, her jaw dropping. It was like a paradise. The grass under her feet was still wet with dew,

flowers and trees grew everywhere and the air smelled sweet. Stormfly wandered past her, drinking from the nearby stream with a contented growl and Astrid sat next to her, idly picking a flower and sniffing it.
This place is amazing.

>Then, she heard the growl, jumping to her feet and drawing her axe, as the Dragon emerged from the cave, a single horn on its nose and a wide frill behind its head.
Hobblegrunt!

>Astrid backed away, watching it carefully; Hobblegrunts changed their colour in response to their mood. Right now, its body was a deep purple, indicating curiosity. This was the first time that Astrid had ever seen a Hobblegrunt. If she could tame it, then she could show Valka that she knew as much about Dragons as she did.
'Stay here, girl.' Astrid said, holding her axe loosely at her side, advancing towards the Hobblegrunt with her hand extended. It raised its head as she approached, baring its teeth with a soft hiss.

>'It's okay.' Astrid said, taking another step closer and the Hobblegrunt rose up on its hind legs, its skin rapidly turning a deep, angry red.
'Uh-oh...'

>Astrid backed up, diving left as the Hobblegrunt lunged at her, jaws snapping through the air where she had just been. She charged towards it, her axe raised and its tail lashed out towards her. She ducked under the blow, swinging her axe to try and drive it back, so that she could get to Stormfly. Killing it wasn't an option. Faster than she could react, its claw struck her across the shoulder, knocking her off her feet. She struggled to rise as it leapt towards her, its jaws extended when Stormfly charged into it, knocking it sideways. They tumbled across the ground, snarling and scratching, until it flung Stormfly away with a sweep of its tail. It lunged towards her and Astrid leapt onto its back, jamming the handle of her axe between its teeth.
'Stormfly, Spineshot!' She yelled and Stormfly flicked her tail, launching a volley of sharp spines towards the Hobblegrunt. Astrid dived aside as it shielded its head with its wings and she raced towards Stormfly, scrambling onto her back.

>'Come on, Stormfly. We need to get out of here.' She yelled, and Stormfly shot towards the nearest tunnel. With a roar, the Hobblegrunt flew after them, launching a blast of fire from its mouth, a burning lump of rock that sizzled past her head and buried itself in the cave wall.
'Faster, Stormfly.' Astrid yelled, the Hobblegrunt snapping at her tail. Then, Cloudjumper shot out from another tunnel, landing in front of the Hobblegrunt, raising his wings to block the way. He gave a deep rumble in his throat as Valka stood up on his back, raising her staff, a soft rattling noise filling the tunnel. The Hobblegrunt crouched low to the ground, its colour changing to a soft yellow and Valka slipped off Cloudjumper's back, kneeling next to it and whispering gently in its ear. With a soft growl, it turned and flew away, disappearing down the tunnel, and Valka turned to Astrid.

>'Come with me.'

Astrid sat on the grass next to the fire, Valka's cloak drawn around her while the older woman cleaned and bandaged her shoulder wound with a practiced ease.

>'There.' She said, sitting back. 'You were very lucky, you know. The Dragons here are extremely territorial.'
>'It wasn't luck.' Astrid replied, hotly. 'I'm a soldier and Stormfly and I have been in tougher scrapes than that.'

>'I'm sure.' She said, sternly, her tone softening. 'Hiccup speaks very highly of you, Astrid. And I can tell that Stormfly is very

devoted to you. You have a strong bond. But there's still so much that you don't know about Dragons. I can teach you, if...'
'I don't need your help! We managed fine by ourselves before you came along and...'

>She was interrupted by a loud roar that echoed off the cliffs and Valka sprang to her feet, her staff in hand.
'What is it?' Astrid asked, but she held up her hand, walking towards the cliff edge ahead and looking down. Astrid cast aside her cloak and followed her, dropping into a crouch at the cliff edge and looking down at the cove, her eyes widening at what she saw. Below them was a Scauldron, an iron collar with chains around its neck, being dragged towards a boat by a group of men in rough clothes. As she watched, the Dragon was brought aboard, the chains secured to the deck and the boat cast off, its sail unfurling as they left the cove.

>'Who are they?' Astrid asked.
'Slavers. Even though Drago's dead, there are plenty of other people who are willing to pay handsomely for live Dragons. Stay here and I'll...Astrid, wait!'

>Astrid ignored her shout, racing towards Stormfly and vaulting into the saddle.
'Let's go!'

>Stormfly took off, diving towards the boat, launching a ball of fire across their bow. Astrid smiled grimly as she saw them scrambling across the deck as Stormfly fired again. This time, her blast hit one of the chains securing the Scauldron to the deck. Then, the deck of the boat opened and her eyes widened as a mounted crossbow was raised into view, tracking towards her. The point of the heavy bolt gleamed in the sun and she pulled up as the weapon fired, the shot passing under Stormfly's left wing. Before they could reload, she dived down, but the Slavers had used the distraction to get ready. Men crowded on the deck, armed with spears and crossbows.
'They're not going to stop us, girl.' Astrid said, diving for another shot, just as a hail of arrows shot towards her, forcing her to roll sideways. She lined up for another run, but their defensive fire was too strong. Even if she got close, she would be an easy target for the spearmen. An arrow struck her shoulder plate and she pulled up, out of their range. Cloudjumper flew next to her, Valka resting her hands on her hips.

>'These Slavers are used to dealing with Dragon Riders, Astrid. They know how to defend themselves. You won't be able to...'
Astrid ignored her, diving down again, only to be repelled by another volley of crossbow fire.

>Dammit.
_As much as she didn't want to admit it, Valka was right. There was no way that she was going to break their defences by herself...

>She stopped as an idea occurred to her, but she didn't like it.
'You're right.' She said. 'I can't do it by myself. But, maybe we can do it, together. I've got an idea...'

Astrid and Stormfly swept down from the sky, the Slavers aiming their weapons as she approached, ready for her. However, this time, she wasn't trying to break through. The crossbows aimed at her and she swept left as they fired, the bolts slashing through the air where she'd been. Now, they had to reload. She pulled up and rolled over, Stormfly launching a fireball that made the Slavers take cover and that was when Cloudjumper struck. He dropped out of the sky to land in the middle of the deck, the Slavers swinging round to face him, feverishly slotting new bolts into their crossbows. With a beat of his wings, he knocked the closest Slavers off their feet and Valka vaulted out of the saddle. Two Slavers rushed at her and she struck the first across the face with her staff, knocking him backwards. The second closed with her, grabbing her staff and forcing her backwards,

his other hand reaching for his sword. Before she could even shout a warning, Valka twisted, dumping him to the deck, the impact knocking him senseless.

>'This is our chance, girl.'
With their defences breached, Stormfly flew over the shield wall and landed on the deck, sweeping her tail to knock three Slavers off their feet, crossbows clattering across the deck and Astrid dismounted, axe in hand. A Slaver charged towards her and she dodged his spear thrust, slamming the handle of her axe into his stomach, doubling him over. One of the fallen Slavers snatched up his crossbow, finger tightening on the trigger and Astrid threw her axe overhand, shattering the weapon. He scowled and unsheathed his dagger, advancing towards her. She ducked under his blow and swept his legs from under him, recovering her battle axe as she rose, Stormfly's tail knocking another two Slaver's overboard and she charged back into the fray.

>'We'll cover you!' She yelled to Valka, who leapt back onto Cloudjumper, gesturing to the chains that held the Scauldron to the deck. Cloudjumper reached down, his claws tearing through the chains them like they were paper. The Scauldron roared, spreading its wings and took off, heading back towards the Sanctuary.
'Yes. We did...'

>Astrid's shout died as Slavers poured up from the decks below, already aiming their crossbows.
'Come on!' Astrid yelled, leaping onto Stormfly's back, her and Cloudjumper rocketing skywards, a hail of arrows whistling past them as they strove for height. Astrid hunched over the saddle, as low as she could, expecting to feel a stab of pain as an arrow pierce her back, until they were out of range. Cloudjumper came alongside her and Astrid glanced over at Valka.

>'I'm... sorry.' She said, looking down at her hands. 'I...was jealous of you and I let that get to me.'
'I know, Astrid. It's alright...

>'No, it's not. I'm a soldier. I'm not supposed to let my feelings get in the way of doing my job.'
'You remind me a lot of myself when I was your age, Astrid. You're harder on yourself than anyone can be. But, none of us are perfect. You have a good heart. You and Stormfly are welcome to visit the Sanctuary any time. I think there's a lot that we could learn from each other.'

>'We'd be honoured.' Astrid said and Stormfly growled her agreement. 'Thank you.' 'Excellent. Now, how about a rematch? First one back to Berk wins?'
'You're on!'

****Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoyed it. Any reviews, comments and constructive criticism very welcome.****

End
file.